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Voluntary Public

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Spain

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German *E. coli* Outbreak Viewed From Spain

Report Categories:

Food Security

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Report Highlights:

There was relief in Spain when the EU Commission confirmed that the bacteria responsible for the outbreak *E. coli* serotype O104 was not present in the cucumbers tested. There was also strong disagreement with the way Germany handled the initial stages of the crisis which resulted in several countries banning Spanish and third country imports of fruits and vegetables. The losses to Spain's horticultural sector are estimated at up to \$200 million Euros per week.

General Information:

The memo published on 31 May by the EU Commission confirms that the bacteria responsible for the outbreak *E. coli* serotype O104 was not present in the cucumbers tested. It reads: "The European Commission has been informed that the results of tests on cucumbers made by the Hamburg (Germany) authority responsible for Food Safety did not confirm the presence of the STEC serotype O104, which is responsible for the outbreak, despite the fact that the sampled cucumbers tested positive for STEC. Cucumbers were considered as one of the possible sources responsible for the Shiga toxin-producing *E. Coli* (STEC) outbreak affecting Germany and other Member States. The results of tests on other samples are pending."

"Germany recognizes that the Spanish cucumbers are not the cause," German state secretary for agriculture Robert Kloos said on the sidelines of an EU farm ministers meeting in Hungary. Rosa Aguilar, the Spanish Minister for the Environment, Rural and Marine Affairs, also participated in an informal meeting of the EU farm ministers held on May 31 in Hungary. During this meeting the minister transmitted to Commissioner Dacián Ciolos the need to activate extraordinary measures in the framework of the Common Market Organization to aid the Spanish as well as other countries' producing sectors that have been affected by the *E. Coli* outbreak reported in Germany. Rosa Aguilar has communicated her disagreement with the way the German authorities are managing the crisis and asked the German Secretary of State to use more caution in presenting the results of the investigations being conducted so as to stop the negative consequences to the Spanish producing sector whose competence the minister defended, highlighting the quality and safety of the Spanish food industry products. The Minister was glad that this Informal Council agreed to meet next week to discuss the situation and announced Spain will then present the results of its investigation.

In the meantime the director general of the Spanish Federation of Producers and Exporters of Fruit and Horticulture Products (FEPEX) estimated that Spain is foregoing exports worth between 175 and 200 million euro per week. To this it should be added the effect of excess supply on Spain's internal market. José Maria Pozancos noted that Spain's total production of fruits and produce is 16 million tons of which 9 million tons are exported and that the EU market absorbs 90% of exports. If products are not exported they accumulate in the country causing prices to tumble.